

POLITICAL CONDITIONS OF TRANSBORDER CONTACTS OF LEMKOS LIVING ON BOTH SIDES OF THE CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS

Lemkos are the group of Ruthenian population that reach furthest to the west and that stand apart from the Polish and the Slovak populations as far as their culture, religion and language are concerned.

From the 14th century until 1944, they had been densely inhabiting the territory that spread in a form of an elongated wedge on both, the Polish and the Slovakian sides of the Carpathians from the Solinka and the Laborec rivers in the east, up to the Poprad river in the west. Ethnically, it was a homogeneous Lemko region. The Polish and the Slovak populations occupied only a few towns. The territory on the Polish side of the Carpathians inhabited by the Lemkos is called the Lemkos' lands (Łemkowszczyzna). It covers the eastern part of the Sądecki Beskid, the Lower Beskid and the western edge of the Bieszczady Mountains /Czajkowski 1992, Reinfuss 1948, 1987, 1990, Sapoliga 1992/.

The name "Lemko" appeared in the first half of the 19th century. It is a local folk nickname that had been adopted by scientific literature. It had been popularised by Polish and Slovak ethnographers but it had not been known among the Ruthenian population for a very long time. It was only during the inter-war period that it was generally accepted by the Ruthenians of the northern side of the Carpathians as their proper name /Czajkowski 1992, Reinfuss 1948,1990/. On the Slovakian side, however, the name "Lemko" is, in practice, completely unknown among the Ruthenian population. They call themselves by the ethnonym Rusin, Rusnak. This, however, doesn't change the fact that ethnically and as far as their culture, language and religion are concerned, the Ruthenian population that live on both sides of the Carpathians create one group /Sapoliga 1992/.

The Lemkos' lands began to take shape of a separate Carpathian land during the period of the partitions of Poland, that is, at the turn of the 18th and the 19th centuries. The abolishing of the old state frontier between the Hapsburg Monarchy and the Republic of Poland - it had been established as early as in the Middle Ages, and substituting it by an internal frontier of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, had certainly a favourable effect upon that /Nowakowski 1992/.

However, long before that, in the 15th - 18th centuries, neither the mountain ranges nor the Hungarian-Polish border that ran between them, did not prevent the Ruthenian people from mutual contacts. Shepherds from the south pastured their flocks and built their huts in the royal woods on the northern side. Bands of highland robbers, so called "beskidniki", that were prowling both sides of the border since the middle of the 15th century, consisted of the inhabitants of the villages situated on both sides of the border /Reinfuss 1987, 1992/. In the 18th century, after the Cossack wars in Poland, many peasants escaped from the northern Lemkos' lands to the Hungarian part, fearing a revenge from the Polish noblemen /Slawski 1969/.

Seeking better living conditions on the southern part of the Carpathians was also common in the later years. Differences in climate caused that the Carpathian Lemkos could hire themselves as farm workers in the lowlands where the time for farm field work, especially the harvest and haymaking, came a few weeks earlier than in the Carpathians. Before the First World War, Lemkos used to be almost exclusively hired to work on manorial estates on the Hungarian side where the work conditions and the earnings were better than in Galicia /Reinfuss 1987, 1992, Sapoliga 1992, Toroński 1860/.

Through the Lower Beskid, the ancient trade tracts ran. They linked the piedmont Galicia towns (Biecz, Dukla, Grybów, Gorlice) with the towns of the southern Carpathians, especially with Bardejov and Košice. The goods were most often transported by the local Lemko peasants /Kiryk 1968/. They developed the peddling trade that, to a large degree, helped to form closer contacts between the inhabitants from both the sides of the Carpathians. It was the northern Lemkos who specialized in the peddling trade. Before the First World War, they used to bring their goods as far as Budapest or even further, beyond the Danube. However, trade exchange that was taking place in the piedmont towns was even more important than the peddling trade. The Lemko people used to sell their products, mainly agricultural produce, and buy

handicraft articles. On the southern side of the Carpathians, Stara L'ubovna, Bardejov, Stropkov, Svidnik were the main market towns. Fairs were organized in those places and peasants from all over the Lemkos' lands used to meet there /Reinfuss 1992/.

Contacts connected with religious cult had very significant influence on the formation of the folk culture on both sides of the Carpathians. After the introduction of the Greek Catholicism - on the Lemkos' lands it came rather late and with strong resistance, the whole Lemko population were Greek Catholics. Their main centre of religious cult was the monastery in Krasny Brod, situated in Slovakia. The other important place for pilgrimages was the cloister in Bokovska Horka, near Stropkov. Church fairs in those places were attended by the Greek Catholic population who lived on both sides of the Carpathians. On the northern side of the Lower Beskid, there was no Greek Catholic centre for pilgrimages. The only place where Church fairs were not attended exclusively by local people was Myscowa.

Though Greek Catholics, Lemkos willingly attended Roman Catholic church fairs. On the southern side, it was mainly Bardejov and Gaboltov which were visited by both the Lemkos from the north and by Poles. Until the First World War, both the Lemkos from the south and from the north attended Roman Catholic church fairs on the Galicia side. The greatest numbers visited Stara Wieś near Brzozów where Poles, Lemkos and Slovaks met /Reinfuss 1992/.

The variety of contacts that linked the Lemko population until the First World War from both the sides of the Carpathians, gave them an opportunity to know each other and to evaluate each other. The Lemko people from the south were certainly more highly appreciated. They impressed the Lemkos from the north by their culture and wealth which helped to adopt various models. Lemkos from Galicia did not attain such a high position in the opinion of their kinsmen from the south, and that was the main reason for the difficulty in the infiltration of cultural patterns from the north to the south. Lemkos from the south adopted very few models from their neighbours from the north /Reinfuss 1992/.

The 19th century and the first half of the 20th century were the period which was the most favourable for the contacts between the Lemko people from the south and the north of the Carpathians. The life within the framework of one state - the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and with the sole division created by the internal administrative

boundary, did not cause none or only minimal restrictions to their mutual contacts. After 1918 such favourable conditions have never occurred again.

The outcome of the First World War threatened with the interruption of free contacts between the Lemkos' south and north, and that might bring negative consequences, especially for Lemkos from the north who were economically dependent upon the south, due to the seasonal farm labour and trade exchange. That is why, after the war ended, Lemkos became politically active in order to secure their future as far as economy, society and nation were concerned. On both sides of the Carpathians Lemkos' local organizations and committees were being established /Kwilecki 1970/.

On the 5th of December, 1918, in the village Florynka (Grybów district) at the public meeting organized by the Lemko political activists of Old Ruthenian orientation, the rise of the Ruthenian National Republic of Lemkos was proclaimed. The influence of the Republic was limited to the western Lemkos' lands. The Lemko activists assembled in the governing government of the Republic were not unanimous in their views on the future of the Lemkos' lands. Common for all of them was the aspiration to create an undivided Lemkos' land either as an autonomic social and political organism or as an entirety within the boundaries of one state. The concept to annex the whole of the Lemkos' lands to Czechoslovakia had more supporters /Nowakowski 1992, Kwilecki 1970/.

At the same time, in Slovakia, the Ruthenian National Councils were already active in Prešov, Užhorod and Chust. Each of them had different plans as to their own future. The Prešov Council wanted to be joined to Slovakia, the Užhorod Council wanted an autonomy within Hungary, and the Council in Chust wished to be included into the Ukraine. On the 21st December, 1918, in Prešov, the Carpatho-Ruthenian National Council was established which included also the Ruthenian National Republic of Lemkos /Nowakowski 1992, Magosci 1993/.

The Polish government, disturbed by the development of events in the Lower Beskid, set about to counteract. The leaders of the Republic were arrested and border guards were installed on the Carpathian border to stop smuggling and the border traffic. Finally, the Ruthenian National Republic of Lemkos ceased to exist by the end of March 1920 /Nowakowski 1992/.

At the same time - on the eastern Lemkos' lands, the Republic of Komańcza, of the Ukrainian character, was being organized. This Republic was created during the time of the Polish-Ukrainian fighting over Lviv and when the West-Ukrainian People's Republic was proclaimed in Lviv. 27 villages situated in the Os³awa valley joined the Republic of Komańcza. A resolution to boycott Polish offices and institutions, and to introduce the Ukrainian language to schools was then passed.

In the second half of January, 1919, the Polish army units began military operations. On 23rd January, Wis³ok was taken over almost without any military action and the next day the last centre of resistance, in Komańcza, was defeated /Nowakowski 1992, Reinfuss 1991/.

At the peace conference in Paris where all the matters of argument were being considered and all the territorial claims settled, even the ones brought forward by very small ethnic groups, the question of the national status of territory of the northern Lemkos' lands was not at all discussed /Nowakowski 1992/.

The events of the 1918-1920 on the Lemkos' lands indicated that Lemkos wanted to determine their own fate, that they were aware of their ties with the people who lived on the southern slopes of the Carpathians, and that they aimed at the indivisibility of the Lemkos' ethnic territory. The establishment of the Lemko Republics manifested the aspirations for national independence that were rising among Lemkos.

After the armistice between Poland and Soviet Russia was signed, the Polish government began to put the internal matters of the state into order. On the Lemkos' lands desertion was to be stopped and the Polish-Slovak border sealed. Border guard posts were established, border zone fixed, and very severe regulations concerning living and staying in that zone were introduced. Those actions considerably limited smuggling, desertion, and illegal border traffic, but, at the same time, and for the first time, cut off Lemkos' from the north from their family, income, and trade contacts with the Lemkos' population in Slovakia /Nowakowski 1992/. Since that moment, the border has become a barrier in the development of interhuman relations, and, except very insignificant changes, has remained like that till now.

The loss of the opportunity of seasonal farm work in Slovakia and Hungary was the most painful. During the inter-war period Lemkos from the north had to seek

jobson the Polish Plateau where work conditions and earnings were much worse than on the southern side of the Carpathians /Reinfuss 1992/.

Also for the Lemko peddlars from the north, the trade after the First World War became enclosed within the Polish borders. They began then to travel with their goods far to the north, but they continued, though in a much smaller way, to trade illegally on the southern side of the Carpathians /Reinfuss 1992/.

As the years went by and Lemkos' loyalty to Poland increased, the Polish government began to liberalize their border regulations in the Carpathians, though, when compared with the period of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the restrictions were still very severe /Nowakowski 1992/. The development of their national awareness resulted in that Lemkos began to regard themselves as a separate society and their contacts, though much limited, continued to exist.

On the 1st September, 1939, the Lemkos' lands went entirely under the German occupation.

The first displacement of the Lemko population who lived in Poland, took place in the spring of 1940 on the grounds of an agreement between Germany and the USSR relating to the exchange of the Ukrainian population for Germans who were moving from the USSR to the Reich. About 5 thousand Lemkos left then. Some of the displaced returned when the Ukraine was invaded by Germans.

In the years 1944-46 Lemkos were included in another displacement action. This time, it was carried out on the grounds of an agreement made between the Polish communists and the governments of the Ukrainian Socialist Republic and Belorussian Socialist Republic. The agreement provided for the displacement from Poland to the Socialist Republics of the Ukraine and Belarus *"the citizens of the Ukrainian, Belorussian, Russian, and Ruthenian nationalities"*. In the official documentation of that time, this displacement was constantly referred to as the "evacuation", and it was an entirely misleading term /Pud³o 1992/.

The displacement was to be voluntary, but the principle of giving the people a free choice of their national status was never observed during the whole period of the displacement. There were administrative, and economic pressures, and when in the second phase of the "evacuation" the armed forces were used, any "voluntary character" of the action was entirely out of question /Nyczanka 1987, Kwilecki 1970/.

Ultimately, nearly 483 thousand of the "Ukrainians and Ruthenians" left Poland at that time Lemkos were also among them. Their number is estimated at least 70

thousand people, that is, about 60-70% of the Lemko population before the Second World War /Pudło 1992/.

No matter how far the displacement of Lemkos to the Ukrainian Socialist Republic was in agreement with their wishes, and to what extent it was forced upon them, it was a turning point in their ethnic position. A decided majority of Lemkos found themselves in the Ukraine and a minority remained in Poland. Thus, the former ethnic group was permanently divided.

The third stage of the displacement of Lemkos took place in 1947. It formed a part of a military operation "Wisła", which aimed at putting an official end to the activity of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UIA). The operation "Wisła" also included the whole of Lemkos' lands in spite of the fact that UIA's activity on this territory, especially in its western part, was only sporadic. This time it was an obligatory displacement and it left no choice as to the place of migration. The usual criterium for being qualified for the displacement was the observance of the eastern religious cult, namely the Greek Catholic or Orthodox. The displacement included everybody whom the Polish communist government recognized as the Ukrainians /Pudło 1992/.

The total number of Lemkos who were displaced to the territory of the western and northern Poland during the operation "Wisła" in 1947 is estimated at 30-35 thousand, that is, about 25% of Lemko population living in the northern Carpathians before the war /Kwilecki 1964, 1970, Nyczanka 1987, Pudło 1992, Reinfuss 1990/.

The displacement of the Lemko population destroyed irreversibly the specific ethnic and cultural character of the Lemkos' lands. The national relationships that had existed there in a practically unchanged state since the 15th and the 16th centuries, were completely changed.

On the Slovak side, the Lemko population were not displaced by force from their ethnic motherland after the Second World War. After the displacement of the Lemko people from the territory of southern Poland in the years 1944-1947, the name "Lemko" in the eastern Slovakia became almost completely forgotten. Fear of the fate similar to that of the Polish Lemkos played a significant role. Traditional ethnonyms - Rusin, Rusnak, were still dominant on the southern side of the Carpathians. In the fifties they were officially changed by the Czechoslovakian communist government to the ethnonym - Ukrainian, that since then was to be the only name of the Ruthenian people in the Carpathians /Sapoliga 1992/.

After 1947, the contacts between the Lemkos from the north and from the south practically ceased to exist. The main reason for that was the displacement, of Lemkos from the northern Carpathians and constraints introduced by Stalin's political system.

After the political changes of 1956, a small number of Lemkos returned from the western part of Poland to the Lemkos' lands. Some administrative regulations were also liberalized. However, this did not improve the possibilities of contacts between both the groups of the Lemko population. Border traffic regulations in the communist countries were very severe, but it was not the administrative regulation that were the most important factor, but the fact that there were only a few thousands of Lemkos living in the northern Carpathians (there had been about 115 thousand before the displacement).

Now, on the Polish side of the Carpathians, on the Lemkos' lands, the Lemko population lives, very widely dispersed, on the territory of six districts in 63 villages, but it is only in 11 villages that Lemkos are the majority of the inhabitants. Decidedly, the largest concentration of the Lemko people exists in the Uście Gorlickie district (18 villages) and in the towns of Krynica and Komańcza. Despite their coming back after 1956, the number of Lemko people who live now on the Polish side of the Carpathians is estimated at not more than about 5% of the total number of Lemkos on this territory before 1944, that is, about 4-6 thousand people. However, these are only approximate data that can differ significantly. It depends what kind of criteria is being applied. Still, this does not alter the fact that the Lemkos are certainly a minority in the northwestern part of the Carpathians. Ethnically, it is the Polish population that is dominant now on the territory of the present day Lemkos' lands /Barwiński 1995/.

Considerably more Lemkos live now on the Slovakian side of the Carpathians. Their number is estimated at about 150 thousand people who live in about 220 places. Most of the villages that are inhabited by the Lemko people are in the districts of Svidnik (91 villages), Humenne (40 villages), Bardejov (38 villages), Stara L'ubovna (23 villages) Vranov (15 villages) /Sapoliga 1992/.

From the administrative point of view, the situation has considerably improved since 1989 when the countries of Central Europe regained their full independence. there are no problems now with obtaining passports. Poles and Slovaks (including Lemkos) do not need invitations or visas when crossing the border. New border

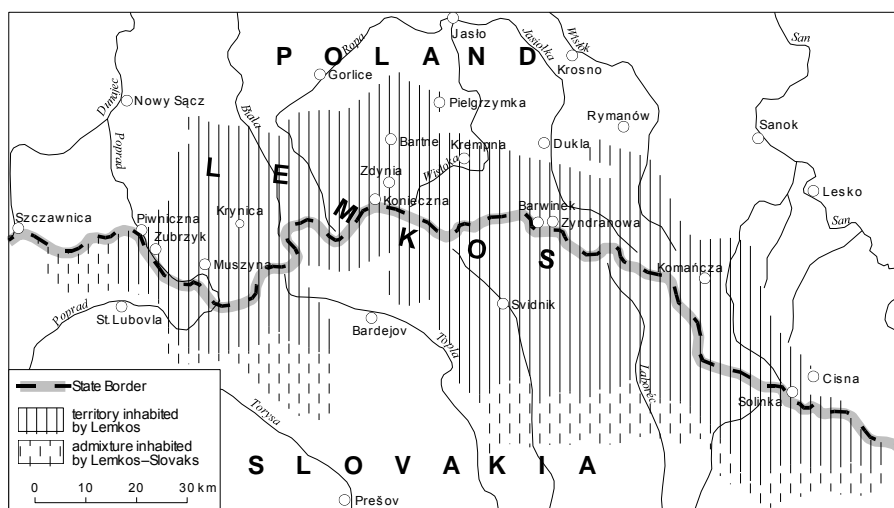
crossing points have been built in Konieczna and Łupków. There are regular coach lines that connect Krosno and Košice, Prešov and Humenne, and Nowy Sącz and Stara L'ubovna, Prešov. Direct coach lines help to develop transborder trade. This trade, however, has not developed directly in the neighbourhood of the border crossings but in larger towns nearby. Slovaks come most often to Krosno and Nowy Sącz, and Poles to Prešov.

The most numerous meeting of the Lemko people from Poland and Slovakia occur now on the occasions of various festivals of the Lemko culture. About 10 thousands Lemkos from Poland, Slovakia, and the Ukraine arrive every year to Zdyna (Uście Gorlickie district) to attend the *Lemkiwska Watra* - the Festival of the Lemko Culture. *Rusnalia* in Zydranowa (Dukla district) is also well known and attended by great numbers.

The abolition of the communist system and changes in political system have made it possible to undertake some local initiatives for real transborder co-operation. In 1993 The Union of Tourist and Health Resorts Districts was established. Its members are now the Polish districts of Krynica, Muszyna, Piwniczna and Uście Gorlickie and the Slovak districts of Stara L'ubovna and Poprad. Also in 1993, two Polish voivodeships: Krosno and Przemyśl, together with their counterparts in the Ukraine, Slovakia and Hungary, created the Carpathian Euroregion. At present, almost the entire territory inhabited by Lemkos (except the western Lemkos' lands), both in Poland and Slovakia, belong to the Carpathian Euroregion.

The statute provides that the co-operation will include: protection of the natural environment, development of tourism, promotion of small and medium businesses, development of the communication infrastructure, and the spheres of culture and education. One of the main aims is to develop and to improve contacts between the inhabitants of the Carpathian Euroregion /Kunach 1995/.

The emergence and the activity of the Carpathian Euroregion may stimulate the transborder contacts between Lemkos from both the sides of the Carpathians, with the contacts have been for years contributing to the development of this area. Though, any real effects are still to come.



Lemkos (1944) according to R. Reinfuss

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